

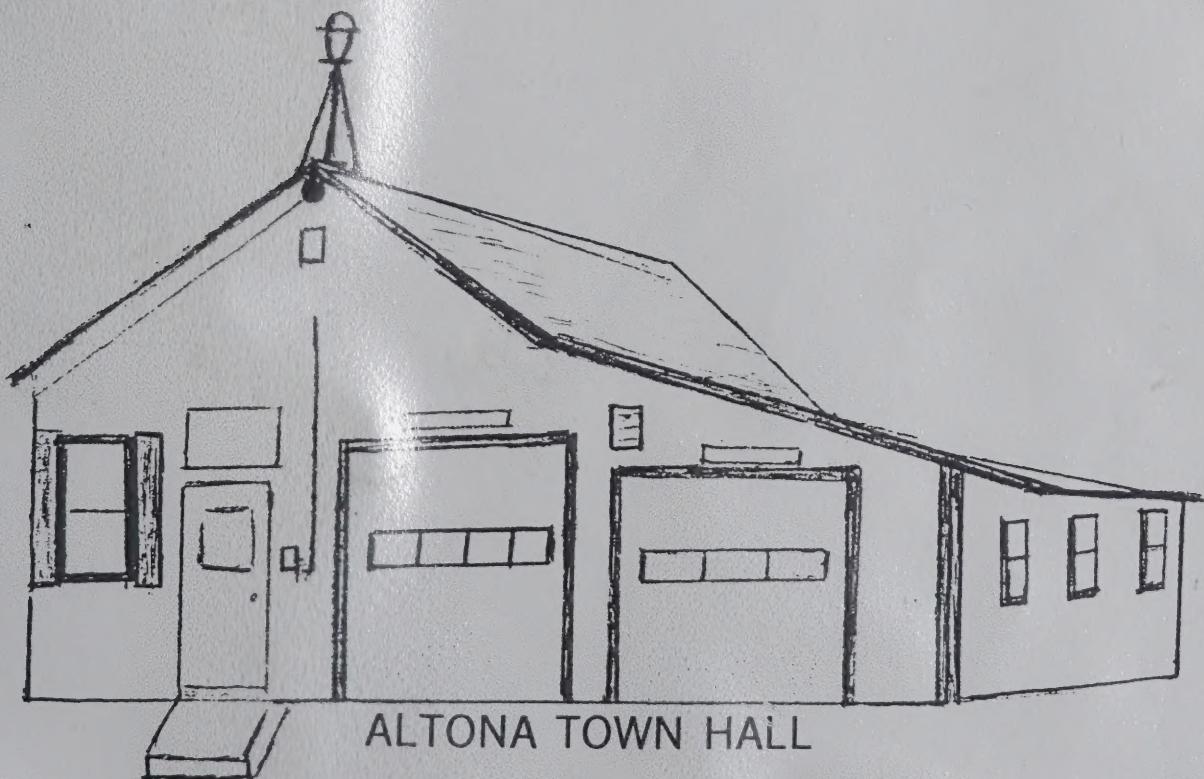
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STORIES of ALTONA

By Lois Cobler



deeply rooted in that of Altona, our neighboring town of 5 persons to the west of us. Today's column will attempt to reveal little known facts about our heritage.

While working with my research materials, I found a card given to me when I visited the historic home of Thomas A. Edison where he was born in Milan, Ohio, in 1847. It is appropriate for this column. The author is unknown. The following lines I have copied from the card:

LITTLE TOWN

like to live in a little town,
where the trees meet across
the street,
Where you wave your hand and
say, "Hello" to everyone you
meet.
like to stand outside the hard-
ware store
And listen to the friendly gossip
of the folks that live next
door.
For life is interwoven with the
friends we learn to know.
And we hear their joys and
sorrows as we daily come and
go.
So I like to live in a little town, I
care no more to roam,
For every house in a little town
is more than a house—
It's HOME.

Author unknown.

My experiences in Altona began a long time before I taught school in their two-room schoolhouse from 1918 to 1922.

Because my goal in life was to be a teacher, I decided to earn enough money to pay my tuition at Tri State Normal School in Angola. Charles Ross, an Altona resident, owned the C. Ross Meat Market which was located in the I.O.O.F. store building that burned down on Christmas night, 1972.

I graduated from Garrett High School on the 7th day of May, 1917. M. D. Renkenberger was Supt. of Schools and George Carroll, Principal. Dr. John D. Thomson, D. B. Van Fleit, and Carl H. Heinzerling were members of the School board who signed my diploma.

As soon as I graduated, Mr. Ross took me into the store where I worked until the summer of 1918.

In those days, all that a teacher needed was a high school education and at least twelve weeks' Normal School training, to teach in the elementary grades.

World War I had taken all of the boys and the schools lacked teachers.

My aunt, Mrs. A. F. Hathaway, lived at 909 West Quincy street, next door to the Sam Houser family. He was a member of the Altona School

them all or my me since — a great deal of time visiting my relatives who had one daughter, Aleda, just my age.

When the time came to supply the Altona School with teachers, Mr. Houser had no teacher for the first four grades.

My aunt said to him, "Why don't you hire Lois Cobler?"

My license issued from the DeKalb County School Superintendent, Mr. Green, was all I needed. And so it was that for three years I taught grades 1, 2, 3 and 4 with Anne Bevier who was the teacher in the upper grades, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

One of the concerns of Mr. Houser was that of my ability to discipline well. There were children in the lower grades who had just arrived from Alabama. Being black, they had had no opportunity to attend school. Some were larger than I was. But with Miss Bevier's suggestions we managed to teach them. They had fine parents and not only were they employed in the B&O shops, but were janitors in the City Hall, bank, and hired as maids in some of the Garrett homes.

The story of Altona schools, according to Mary Comesky, who lives at 1304 West Quincy, stated that there was a wooden building on a site just east of the present abandoned school building now owned by Bill Andrews who converted it into apartments. I never saw that building since it is assumed it burned down being so near the railroad.

However, the school trustees acquired an acre of land on Co. Rd. 48 owned by Mr. Downend. On Jan. 25, 1877, the sum of \$150 was paid to the owner.

J. W. Garvey had been building the B&O car shop, roundhouse and machine shop. He was hired to erect the school on the Downend lot, consisting of one room for all eight grades.

In 1901, as the need arose for a larger building, L. C. Weils, a Garrett contractor, and Mr. Allman, brick layer, made an addition to the north end of the building at a cost of \$2,243, where my four grades were taught, from Sept. 1918 to May, 1922. A belfry had the school bell.

The room had benches in front. Each class took its place when the children recited. While one grade was on the benches, the others were expected to study, or work on "busy" work which was thought up by the teacher.

Fortunately for me, I had a very fine group of children who helped each other. Among them was Howard Watts, who lives at

been school teachers in a town called Rob Roy. Mr. Watts later became a U.S. mail clerk on the B&O and was a valuable advisor to the Altona schools.

Howard was one of my "helpers." He was anxious to help the children learn to read, and many times became their "teacher" while I was at work with the various classes.

In writing this column, Howard offered much of my material and I am indebted to him for the rich research he gave me, as well as his personal experiences in Altona.

He recalled that as a small boy he went to Feagler's and Kooken's grocery stores, one on the corner of Baker and Quincy, the other across the street. It was not the fact of their existence that came back with considerable force but it was recalling the way the merchandise was handled. "Today we might categorize the stores as 'full service' groceries," Howard stated.

"So much of what we now find in cans, plastic or boxes was then handled in bulk. Butter, peanut butter, and lard were picked up with a paddle and slapped into a cardboard tray. Sugar, crackers and cookies pulled from large bins, sacked and weighed as one bought them (pretty sticky and stale during the humid summer). A dozen eggs placed in a paper sack was something else, while attempting to get them home without too much breakage was a real challenge to a small boy. Bulk foods, oiled floors, open twists of tobacco, hanging bananas, somewhat spoiled, sawdust at the meat counter, these and other things made up an aroma unlike anything else;—an aroma that was unmistakably that of a grocery store.

Howard said, "there is much, too, that I can remember about the physical layout of our school, as well as smells of that Altona school." "Some," he said, "were not as important as the ones dealing with interpersonal relationships. To a student the teacher seems very remote, especially to a first or second grader. As the years come and go that feeling of remoteness disappears until there comes a realization that student and teacher shared a common purpose, were in a sense, part of the same frame." There also comes somewhere along the way, some understanding of the influence that school teachers have as an individual on each one's total life."

Those above quotes were taken from a communication

Altona. (It is a testimonial to cherish.)

That school building became the possession of Bill Andrews when the Garrett-Keyser-Butler corporation closed the doors to the school in 1956 because of consolidation. Today the building has been converted to apartments.

Thus, the bell to that schoolhouse is cherished by one who went to that school, and all grocery stores are just a memory.

With apologies to Paul Harvey, it will be necessary to write another column about Altona, which I will call, "THE REST OF THE STORY TO JANUARY 1, 1984."

I shall tell about the "Worst Crossing Wreck Between the Interurban and an Automobile in Altona"; "The Churngold Man"; "Celebrations Which Took Place," "Altona's Government and Fire Dept." "Noted personalities who made the news"; "Altona's improvements since its beginnings"; and more.

Having written several columns about Altona, I am reminded of the story of a Texan sitting on an oil field. He stated, "it is hard to know where to dig in first."

Many stories developed from the rich heritage of those now living in Altona from which I gained information. Scrapbooks compiled by families were given to me containing Altona news beginning at the turn of the century. Little known facts came to light, including the Jan. 2, 1929 B&O freight train wreck at Auburn Jct.

On Wednesday night, Jan. 2, 1929, three Altona men were killed and a fourth was seriously injured when the auto in which they were riding was struck by a B&O freight train at the crossing in Auburn Junction.

Richard Hall, aged 19, Clifford Miller, aged 25, Clayton Watier, 21, and Samuel Leeson, 20, were returning from work at the E. L. Cord Automobile Factory in Auburn, where they had worked until 9 o'clock.

The weather was similar to what we have been experiencing. Railroad men expressed the opinion that the driver of the car did not see the east bound freight train with Will Clady and Ralph Miller in the cab of the engine. Mr. Clady reported that he had seen the approaching car and blew his whistle.

A west bound freight had just gone by and the men were not aware of the east bound freight train until almost upon the crossing, and then, while applying the car's brakes in a vain effort to stop, the car slipped on the ice-covered road and slid on the tracks directly in front of the train. Marks of the tires on the road indicated this. There were not witnesses. Before the accident, the car containing the four men was seen to stop while the west bound freight passed.

All of the men suffered fractured skulls and their bodies were badly mangled. Mr. Leeson survived and he was taken to the Sanders Hospital, Auburn, where he spent many months recovering. Hall and Miller were instantly killed and Watier died on the way to the hospital.

The car rolled over and over, 450 feet from the station. Struck squarely by the huge engine, the light car was hurled down the tracks, being tossed over and over, and crushed on the point of the pilot.

Hall was thrown out of the demolished machine and fell between the tracks. Miller was found under the engine. Watier

was under the crushed car. Leeson was found on the tracks nearby.

Needless to say, doctors, ambulances and coroners were rushed to the scene. Hundreds of persons hurried to Auburn.

All men had attended Garrett High School and young Miller had played on the GHS baseball team. He won a wide reputation as a southpaw pitcher.

The Fort Wayne newspapers carried the story with large headlines the next day after the accident.

W. S. Zolman and family came to Altona from Auburn in the early 1900's where his father, Charles, had been a plumber for twenty-five years. Young "Bill" learned his father's craft. He established a reputation as an excellent plumber which was during the time Garrett's City Council had published rules and regulations for the control of the water works system. With J. O. Landes the only Garrett plumber at that time, Mr. Zolman built his shop in the downtown area.

In those days frozen pipes in winter were common. In spite of the fact that the rules stated "during cold weather shut the water off at night at the stop and waste cock and drain all pipes" the local plumber had a busy time thawing pipes.

In 1917, the Garrett Council passed an ordinance stating that all outdoor toilets should be banned. Bathrooms were installed and homes became equipped with modern facilities.

Celebrations of all kinds were celebrated in Altona. The schoolhouse and church facilities were used for these events.

One of the earliest recorded social affairs of Altona took place on July 7, 1910. It marked the inauguration of a fire truck, with Garrett joining in the celebration.

Music was provided by the Garrett band. A quartet consisting of Harry Brown, Dr. C. Steward, C. E. Reyher and J. D. Brinkerhoff sang. A queen contest was sponsored by Dr. Rodebaugh.

He gave a fifty pound cake to be sold for a penny a piece, which allowed persons to vote for their favorite candidate. Japanese lanterns were strung all over for lighting. Lawyer Howard Mountz gave the main address.

As time went on, box socials, indoor fairs, a minstrel show and benefit shows were money-making projects to provide funds for the fire department.

The fire barn became the

Town Hall. It was not until the fire department was organized in 1914 that the interest in community fire protection really took on ways and means to improve their services to the community. A fire whistle alerts the men to a fire. New fire equipment was purchased. Regular meetings take place twice a month. A woman's auxiliary helps out in emergencies and when fund-raising events and socials take place.

In 1943 at the close of the World War, Altona gave recognition to the 43 young men whose names appeared on the Honor Roll. The DeParis and Sobasky families had a hand in many of Altona's projects.

The women of Altona complained of being afraid of snakes in the swamps surrounding the town. At one time wild animals were seen, including a black bear killed by Earl Tooman's dog in 1957.

In 1957 the sanitary sewer was installed with a maximum depth of 17 feet.

It is reported that Altona has an abundance of drinking water. Only when a fire needs extra water supply does Altona have to call for help from Garrett's supply.

Each property owner has a septic tank.

When the effort came to drain the excessive amount of water in the backyards of the citizen, the first efforts seemed to fail. Even during summer months, water stood in the low places.

A survey connected with the drainage project found 103 homes, 76 families and 78 households. Earth Construction Company was contracted to do the job.

Dave Wolfe wanted to give up. But Howard Watts decided to find out why they were turned down the first time. Finally a grant of \$385,000 was used to build a drainage system in 1979 covering 10,300 feet. Much credit should be given Howard Watts, who never gave up on the project.

When the blizzards of 1978 struck, Altona had no street-cleaning department. But with self-help and community spirit, the citizens organized their own clean-up crews.

No contractors were called in to help in the removal. When the blizzard began on Wednesday with a 17-inch snowfall, the Altona task seemed impossible. Snow drifts, piled as high as roof tops, impeded the effort.

The approximate seven miles of Altona's streets were cleared so traffic could move four days later.

Residents who owned snow removal equipment donated them. Neighbors pooled their efforts to obtain food donations and the fire department auxiliary kept hot meals available for the workers who worked round the clock.

This was just another story of a community who cared for each other.

Last October I received a telephone call from Kenneth Cutler, Jr., asking me to judge Altona's Halloween celebration on Saturday night in their Town Hall. How could I say "No" to a community that gave me my first teaching job and many of these families are even today involved in the town affairs.

I asked Kenneth Cutler, Jr. what inspired this event. He said, "I grew up in Altona when the church was the center of the social events. No longer is that available. The school is part of the Garrett-Keyser-Butler system. Four years ago, I decided to do something about it." He canvassed every family in Altona for funds to finance the event. After the pledges were taken to see whether such a party could be financed, he was assured it was possible. Then he made a trip back to the homes and collected the money. Since that time, four years later, the funds increase yearly.

Hundreds of "hot dogs" were purchased with buns and when they were consumed, Kenny went to town and bought more. The ladies baked cookies and cakes. Beverages of soft drinks and coffee were provided. Prizes for the costume judging contest were also bought from the Garrett merchants, consisting of gift certificates to be used in Garrett. The amounts ranged from the smallest to fifteen dollars, which went to the champion appleeater. The evening ended with a hay ride.

I was completely overwhelmed with the event. I have yet to observe a town in which love and concern for the children can top this. Persons from the cradle to one nearing the century mark were there. The families who have ever been residents of Altona are eligible for the party. No public announcement ever gets out since the affair is a close-knit group.

Altona's present trustees are: Jim Owens, president; Marvin Hall, trustee; Rose Swank, Sec.-Treas.; and K. Cutler Jr., board member. They were all there with many more town folk engineering the party.

Seventy years ago on Feb. 12, 1914, Mayor J. A. Clevenger, Will Franks and Edward Kelham were appointed to a committee for the purpose of annexing Altona to Garrett.

The subject pertaining to this annexation had been discussed for a long time. With the growth of population in Altona and the need for improvements, the time was right for this to take place.

There were some citizens, however, that opposed the merger. Consequently, it was left to Garrett to prepare an ordinance that would take in several additions south, east and north. The first vote was negative. Several months later, the decision to annex became a reality, which displeased a few families in Altona. They threatened to file a remonstrance.

Certain farmers, affected by annexation did not want a higher tax rate that would pay for the luxuries of urban development such as alleys, paved streets, sidewalks and street lights.

Special Judge Bratton of Angola in June, 1915, handed down a decision which was final. It read, "certain unplatted lands...should not be annexed to the city of Garrett as provided by the ordinance passed by Mayor Clevenger."

There were 59 remonstrators in Altona, but by October, 49 names were withdrawn. The town finally was annexed.

Four months later, in January, because of a misunderstanding about representation on the Garrett Council, the matter went again to the courts. In March, 1916, Judge Link of DeKalb Co. Circuit Court, stopped the annexation. The entire idea of Altona ever becoming a part of Garrett was then laid to rest.

Many Altona persons have brought fame to the town. In previous columns, including

April 5, 8 and 12, 1982, I have written about the Leeson family, including Joseph, 1822 Maple Lane, his father, Joe, famous for his part in rounding up Al Capone and Fred Leeson, a former Indiana State Trooper who is retired and now owns his Leeson Insurance Co. in Ligonier.

Don Kooken, a native of Altona was married to Thelma Leeson, Joseph Leeson's aunt. Both Don Kooken and Joe Leeson started out together enforcing Federal laws throughout the U.S. In my story of Don Kooken and Joe Leeson as members of the "Secret Six," I

told how their capture of the Al Capone gang took place and Capone was sent to prison. Don's influence is still being felt today in the Police Academy, the first State Police Training School. His years as an instructor in Indiana University was preserved for posterity as it was written in Indiana's Alumni Magazine, v. 21, #9 and the Indiana Biography Series, Vol. 53, both publications housed in the State Library Archives.

Altona's famous baseball team of the first decade was made up of Geo. Baker, Jay Hall, Dore Houser, Jess Ross, Tom Houser, Vern Allman, Harry Maggert, John Watier, Bill Ray and Newton DePew. Maggert and Houser played on the Garrett team as well as the B&O Championship team which we shall tell about in another column.

Frances Maggert, widow of Forrest Maggert, recalls stories of her father, John C. Reed, who served in the Civil War. He was mustered in March 27, 1864, in the Twenty-first Infantry, Company A., and mustered out Jan. 13, 1866. He witnessed the assassination of Pres. Abraham Lincoln, April 14, 1865, in the Ford theatre, Washington, D.C. John C. Reed is one of the Civil War veterans whose grave is decorated each Memorial Day, in Cedar Chapel Cemetery.

Forrest Maggert and Frances Reed were married in 1930. They became parents of eleven children. Ralph (known as "Sport") resides with his mother. He is employed at Electric Motors.

Before their marriage, Forrest Maggert worked for the E. L. Cord Automobile Co. in Auburn. At the time of his retirement, he was employed by the B&O in the Maintenance of Way Dept.

Rearing eleven children was not easy, especially for the mother who wanted her children to receive an education, first in Altona grades then on to Garrett High. During depression years, she worked in Garrett at the Doc Owens Restaurant for a wage of \$8.50 per week. The children weeded onions west of Altona for ten cents a row, as did many school children not only from Altona, but Garrett.

Arthur and Mary Comesky moved to Altona in 1930. She was the daughter of the well known Geo. Baker family. Her present home is the same as when she and Arthur went to housekeeping. He was well-known for his participation in the area baseball teams. Mary is

the oldest Altona resident.

The Charles Ross family was engaged in the butchering business as well as owning a long-established Ross & Son Meat Market, later known as Ross and Wagner.

His hobby was his giving to charity and church related affairs, and watching the great fights in the area as well as at Madison Square Garden, N.Y., where he had as traveling companion Harry Brown, president of the Garrett State Bank.

He never joined a civic club. He stated that he would give of his means to help those in trouble or need. On one occasion, as a patient at the old Sacred Heart Hospital, he noticed a crack in the plastered wall. He spoke to one of the nuns about it and suggested that it should be repaired, but no money was available to pay to have it done. The conversation did not end there. He asked his wife to bring a sizable check to give to the hospital for the necessary repairs.

As long as the Altona church was in existence, he saw to it that coal heated the building and expenses of the church were met by Mr. Ross's generosity, which few people knew. He had compassion for the needy of Garrett and many families in Garrett were able to live during the years of hardship brought about by railroad strikes or during the depression.

His daughter was engaged in the profession of managing her own beauty salon for many years in Garrett, and her daughter follows her mother in that same profession.

Sally Ross relates the story of the charitable acts of Chas. Ross. During the Depression years and times of B&O strikes, he was known to give the ends of bacon slabs for bean dishes, as well as other cuts of meat for soup. He could not stand to see anyone suffering if he could help.

During the Mexican War, his brother, Jess Ross enlisted June 22, 1916. While stationed at the military camp in Hattiesburg, Miss., he became acquainted with Sally Nelson, whose home was in that city. They were married after the war in 1918.

Four sons were born and Sally is very proud of their accomplishments. Harold graduated from Indiana University in the School of Music and went on to New York University for business education. Professionally Harold is a stock broker and has the distinction of being a

member of the Board of Trustees for Wooster College, Wooster, O., for ten years. Harold married a former Garrett resident, Sue Lane. Their three children, Betsy, Bill and Jim are receiving a college education. Their home is in Lafayette, Calif.

When the Ross boys were in GHS they were active in the Track teams. Nelson's 440 track record has stood for many years. He graduated from Purdue University and received his Master's Degree at the University of Pittsburgh. He is an electrical engineer and is engaged in the U.S. Space program. He is married to the former Ruth Custer, an ordained minister and their home is in Maryland. Their son, Steve lives in Fort Wayne and the twins, Craig and David, and Carol live in Maryland.

Robert pursued a business education in the International Business College, Fort Wayne. He is remembered also as a pianist.

In high school he was also known for his music ability. He organized a band made up of high school students who were: Chas. Carlin, vocalist, and John Wagner, George Pond, Vincent Zecca and Robert Gallatin. Bob has a Real Estate and Antique business in his home town. The

son, David, is an architect in Los Angeles and their eldest daughter lives in Brussels, Belgium. The two youngest are at the California home.

Billy Ross is deceased. He died at the age of twenty as a victim of muscular dystrophy.

More on Altona will be concluded in my next column.
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The story of Altona's government began in 1906. Incorporation took place in June, and the first elections were held on June 15, with 199 votes cast. Theodore Houser, S. O. Whitford and John C. Smith were elected councilmen, with Cary DePew, clerk, and Jonas Veazey, treasurer. All but DePew were Democrats.

Earlier in the year, on Feb. 22, 1906, a notice appeared stating that the T & C I Railway Co., known as the Interurban would begin running cars between Auburn and Garrett on regular schedule time. Altona residents had no trouble using that facility to Auburn, the County Seat.

Since promoters of the Interurban thought the electric railway was the transportation of the future, money from investors poured millions into building track and equipment.

Ironically, Henry Ford was trying to get investors to raise \$100,000 to build a Ford automobile factory. As history relates, the Interurban investors "Lost their shirts" and the automobile investors wound up becoming multi-millionaires. Only \$28,000 was raised for the Ford factory.

The cheap fares by Interurban attracted the riders. Cars left Garrett at the corner of King and Cowen at 7 a.m. and every hour thereafter up to and including 11 p.m. The fare from Auburn to Garrett, one way was fifteen cents, and round trip 25 cents. To Auburn Jct. fare was ten cents, one way, Auburn to Auburn Jct. was five cents.

Altona's strategic location on the railway was a boon to the town. Freight cars handled small parcels of merchandise which could be purchased from wholesalers in Fort Wayne. The newly installed telephone service made it possible to obtain emergency orders in hours.

Stopping in Altona was no problem after the line extended all the way to Kendallville.

The motorman and conductor took pride in the fact that an accurate time schedule was kept so well that the residents stated, "We could set our clocks by their accurate arrivals and departures."

Huntertown was one of the stops between Fort Wayne and Garrett. The stops averaged about one per mile. This made possible a maximum speed of 50 miles per hour.

As time progressed in the electric car business, Indiana Service went all out to improve service and safety, and the

number of accidents were cut down because of crossing safety regulations.

Fort Wayne's freight continued to grow and the speedy and economical cost of freight, together with the use of trucks and devices for handling goods and storing freight, made the use of electric cars available to every farmer along the route.

The motorman on each car became aware of a dangerous intersection in the towns. His warning signals however, went without a sense of safety or danger ahead to some persons.

Eye-witnesses tell the worst accident ever to take place at an Altona crossing.

In July, 1921, just before dusk, five boys from Huntertown had the idea that it would be fun to race the Interurban from Huntertown to Garrett. They jumped into an old automobile which had no top. The race began. The Interurban made its regular stop at the depot in Garrett and had not gained a fast speed when it reached Baker street and Co. Rd. #7 in Altona. It was estimated the speed of the boys car was 40 miles per hour and the Interurban, ten.

Not heeding the motorman's warning bell and horn, the two cars met at the crossing. The cow-catcher on the electric car was torn from it and the rails became a twisted mess.

When the dust cleared, the spectators realized what had happened. The sight was bloody and gruesome.

The Ed Draime family and Mary Comesky were the first on the scene since their homes were at that point. Howard Watts stated that he looked out the window when the crash took place, and what he saw was unbelievable. Bodies of dead and dying were stretched out in his front yard. Undertaker Hinklin, whose mortuary was back of what is now the City Hall, was called to the scene of the accident. One body was decapitated. No local boys, as far as anyone knows, were among the group.

Within minutes, the crossing was a bedlam of onlookers. It was beyond belief as to how a small car and the railway could have done so much damage.

The question of the electric railway came to light just a few years before this had happened, concerning the use of the highway for horses versus the railway cars. Because roads were narrow and with more automobile traffic, it was said that automobiles should have

priority. However, they must stop for a team of horses, and in case the driver of the animals could not control the animal, provision should be made to help him. In Dec. 1902 the electric railway was granted a franchise to construct and maintain in a single track the full length of King street.

Eventually, the railway gave way to the bus, known as the Shortway Bus Co. It ran on a fairly good schedule at first, and stopped to pick up passengers at the corner of King and Randolph, or wherever passengers wished to board the bus. Later the Garrett Hotel became the depot.

Much of Altona's history is linked to transportation, including the B&O. Garrett became an unloading spot for the stock cars being transported from the West to the East markets. Nebraska cattle, sheep and horses were taken off the stock cars and serviced here.

Directly behind the Sally Ross home at 910 Quincy, the railroad had a spur which switched off the cars.

Mr. Isaiah Runion, an employed railroader, lived just beyond the bridge. It did not matter whether it was day or night, winter or summer, Mr. Runion's job was to take care of those animals as they came from the loading and unloading docks.

Just beyond this point were long lines of stock cars waiting to be loaded and serviced. Each stock car had to be cleaned by hand.

Mrs. Runion (Josephine) aided her husband in this part of his job. Their daughter, Suzanne, was just an infant when the Runions took on this duty. At times, it was recalled, that at two in the morning the Runions were notified that the stock cars were unloading. They bundled up Suzanne and away they went.

Today the Runions are retired and spend winters in the South. Suzanne married David Ober, son of Jesse and Olive Ober. The J. E. Ober Elementary School was named in Jesse Ober's honor. He was Principal of the old Central Bldg. and assigned to teach the sixth

graders, whom he taught for seven years, and became Principal in Dec., 1935. He had graduated from GHS in 1922. David graduated from GHS in 1958 and received his PH.D at Purdue. They live near Muncie, where David is Professor of Physics at Ball State University.

Many happenings in Altona involved other wrecks and accidents.

On Jan. 2, 1929, three Altona young men including Clifford Bushong, Richard Hall and Clayton Watier, were killed at Auburn Jct. when their car was struck by a B&O freight train. Sam Leeson, a passenger in the car, was seriously injured, but did recover. The young men were on their way home from work, and their car skidded onto the tracks in front of an east bound freight. W.R. Clady was engineer and J. Ralph Miller conductor.

It was in that year that the State of Indiana announced that effective July 1, all automobile drivers should be licensed. The applicants were required to complete an application and to swear they could read and write English and interpret road signs.

Only those who had been convicted of a felony and those physically handicapped were required to take a driving test. All others stated whether or not they could drive, whether they could or not.

Good things were happening to Altona in the way of improvements. In 1916 gas lines were connected to Altona and the following year electricity from Garrett Utilities came to Altona.

I was hired to teach the primary grades in their school. However, the only modern convenience we had was a gas two-burner hot plate. I was expected to teach Home Economics to the girls in grades 5, 6, 7 and 8, even though I was hired as a primary teacher. Fortunately, Anna Bevier, upper grades teacher, traded classes with me. She taught agriculture to the upper grade boys while I took her girls for cooking and sewing. My only training for that position was what was taught to me by Florence Dobbrick in Home Economics during my senior high school year. Many of my readers recall such foods as "Egg ala Goldenrod" and white sauce. At least I could teach those simple foods.

In my column, dated Jan. 3, I wrote mostly about the Altona school. Today, we shall take a close look at those persons who were devoted to their community and became known for their contributions to society in general.

Garrett's history is interwoven with Altona's even today, as I recount some of their recent accomplishments.

It is ironic that Mary Ellen Hathaway Mead, aunt of A.F. Hathaway (my uncle) became Garrett's fourth postmaster.

When Mary Ellen's father died, he asked the nephews to see to it that she would always be provided a home. Thus, Alton Hathaway provided an apartment in the Hathaway home at 909 West Quincy, where she was living when the need arose in Garrett for a postmaster. The history of the family noted that she was very ambitious and capable to do most any kind of work. Today Blake Keen, grandson, lives there.

We recall that at the turn of the century there was no rural delivery. Altona provided mail service to Garrett until April 21, 1875. Following our first postmasters, W. A. Pratt, Henry Clark and A. H. Phillips, Mary Ellen was chosen to become the postmistress where she served four years. Thus, she is the first woman to serve in a government position in the area.

Martha Dick Bardsley, whose residence was at the corner of Bridge and Quincy streets in Altona, graduated from Garrett High School in 1891, and was a teacher in the old Central school building at the corner of Lee and Houston. I was her pupil in the second grade, which she taught for forty years. In 1937 she ended a career of 47 years in the public schools, seven of which were in Altona, and the others in Garrett. She was small in stature, but carried a tone in her voice when we needed to be disciplined that no one dared question. The community knew her as "Mattie Dick." W. S. Painter was school superintendent, and Jesse Ober, elementary school principal.

Another Altona native who taught in the Garrett school system was Pearl Denison, a GHS graduate of 1911. Pearl was the daughter of the famous "Ice Man" of Altona whose story I wrote in my column dated March 22, 1982.

Pearl was a graduate of Columbia University and came back to Garrett where she taught the primary grades for many years.

Leaders in Altona's community were the Cady family. He carried on a successful lumber business, and Mrs. Cady belonged to a group of women called the Loyal Legion. The Cady house is credited with the fact that it was the first one built in Altona.

As time went on, the streets were named as follows: Union, Quincy, Baker, Bridge, Oak, Elm, Frank, Mill, Railroad, James, Harris and Andrews Lane. The old map of Altona shows the street "Harris" which is in reality King street.

Mary Comesky has the distinction of having lived in Altona longer than any other citizen of the community today. She has been an eye-witness to the growth and changes of the community.

The town grew rapidly as the B&O railroad brought people here to work on the railroad. I like to think of Altona as a microcosm of the world. Today's population of about 275 is not much larger than it always has been. But the names of the early families reveal the countries of the world from which they came to this pioneer community. Names such as DeParis from Italy; Mankowski and Sobraski, Poland; Mrs. G. Maurer, a native of Switzerland; Mr. Mauter her husband, Germany; and others from Ireland, Austria, Canada and Rumania.

I wonder how many of my readers know about "CHURNGOLD." Frank Bechtol, who lived at the west edge of Garrett, became the distributor of the product. Today we know that as oleo or margarine. He took orders and made home deliveries. The least amount one could buy at a time was a five-pound package. Churngold was white. Our mother allowed the churngold to get soft, and then opened the capsule containing a yellow coloring which she mixed into the margarine.

Advertising Churngold was done in one instance by the use of a colored postcard showing a housewife at her telephone talking to a grocer. Grocery stores did not handle that product. The card said, "Hello, Mr. Grocer, I said, Churngold. Nothing else will do. I must have Churngold." Some children created a taste for that product and grew up without ever tasting butter.

I taught the daughter of the Bechtol family, Catherine Bechtol Mayton, who lives in Crewe, W. Va. In a letter from her she wrote, "I grew up on the edge of Garrett in Altona, went to the Altona school and had you for a

teacher in the first and second grades. I remember the shops and roundhouse, as well as several other buildings around there that are gone. Mother told of how she had to walk on a board walk on West King, as it was so swampy out that way. I am sure that you remember them, too....I wonder how many remember the old Altona School. The children now would think it was terrible, but we learned just as well then as in some of the more modern buildings, today."

Dean Bechtol was her brother. He graduated from GHS in 1914. I was a sophomore when he was a senior. All of the high school classes met and had their desks together in the assembly room. Dean Bechtol was considered the clown of the school. He directed school and community plays. After World War I, Dean returned to Garrett, became a postal clerk and reorganized the Boy Scout troop of the American Legion.

He became a charter member of the local Legion Post 178, and in 1943 he became Indiana Department Commander. For meritorious service, the Legion awarded him a Life Membership. The Boy Scout organization awarded him the Silver Beaver for his service to the Scouts.

He became a member of Garrett's Board of Education and while on that Board he worked under Supt. Painter as president, and then E. V. Minnear, as secretary.

In 1956, Dean won the Democratic nomination for 4th District Congressman. But in the landslide election of President Eisenhower, E. Ross Adair defeated Dean Bechtol.

The youngest soldier to enter World War I was Leo Madden from Altona. Leo enlisted in 1917 at the age of fifteen. The army shipped him off to France and the French government decorated him because of his military service.

The swampy, muddy condition of Altona streets caused Mr. Gettle, Kooken and Feagler to build a small slab of cement in front of their stores and one which led into the Methodist church.

These sufficed until 1938 when the WPA was working under government programs during the depression years. Frank Van Ande, Geo. Muhr, and Ed. Draime influenced the men in charge to construct sidewalks all over Altona. Neal H. Dow was the Indiana State Safety Consultant for the project. In order that no one was

injured, certain orders were to be obeyed including: "Lift with your legs" and "Save your back muscles."

As the pioneers of the early Methodist Protestant church began moving westward from Baltimore, they brought with them the love of the church of their choice. One and a half miles south of Altona there was what was called the Hopewell Methodist Protestant church. It is said that this was the second church of the county. Pastor Stackhosue was church preacher from 1891-93.

When Pastor E. Scott took over the pulpit, July 27, 1894, he wrote this date in the Kendallville Mitchell Strout Membership Book. When the membership transferred to the Altona church and Butler Center, the Hopewell church was moved to Altona, where it was rebuilt. The Butler Center church built a new brick building which closed its doors in 1962. These two churches were on the same "circuit" of the Kendallville churches. At Liberty Center, Wells Co., in Aug. 1898, Altona and Butler Center were detached from Kendallville, and Rehobeth was added to Butler Center and the three churches became the Altona Circuit.

When the Altona church on Feb. 26, 1907 suffered the loss of the building in a large fire, the people rose to the occasion and built a cement block structure. The pastor of the church at that time, P. W. Boxell, on May 10, 1907 made the first cement block, and the building was dedicated on May 31, 1908.

According to the writings of Dora Miller, no record of trustees was on record at the County Court House at the time of the fire. The church trustees for the parsonage in 1900, were Pastor Evans lived in it, were: John Maggert, Geo. Probst, Ben Hawwe and G. A. Adams. Other names found who contributed to the ongoing of the building included Oliver and Chas. Weller, Frank Yarde, John Maggert, Ed Kelham, Newton DePew, John Barger and others.

At the annual conference in 1931, Altona was dropped from the other two churches in the conference. It became an independent church. Thirty seven pastors led the congregation in its history from 1894 to 1966. The last name was that of Don Klopfenstein and the first one was E. J. Scott, 1894 to 1896.

To be continued in next column.

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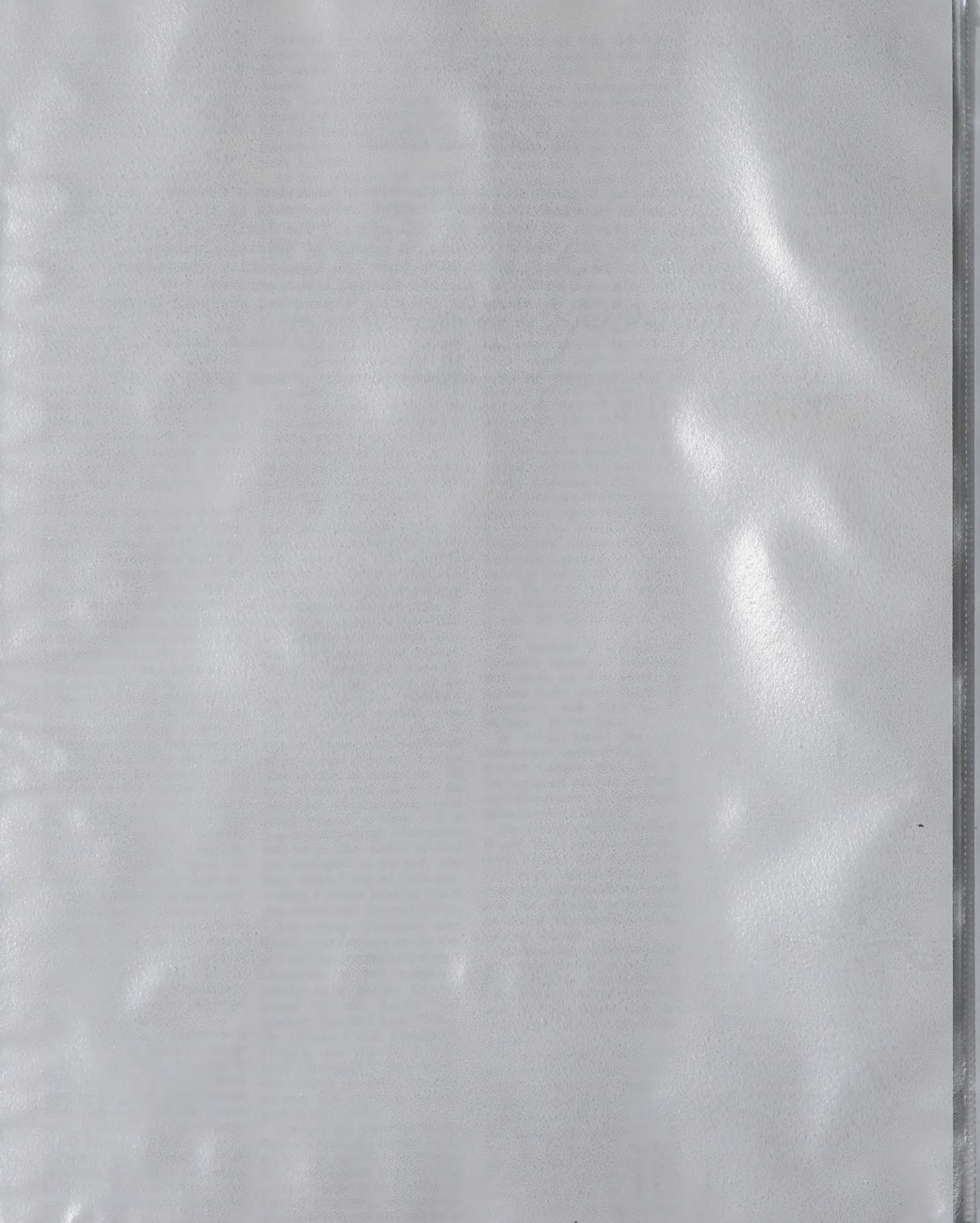
THE ALTONA POST OFFICE

In 1871, just about the biggest event of the winter was when a few days before Christmas, the whole family bundled into the bobsled for the ride to the Altona Post Office. It was housed in the H. E. Gettle general store. The family had spent endless nights pouring over the mail order catalog in search of special Christmas gifts. This trip to the Altona general store would give them the opportunity not only to buy their groceries, but also to find out whether the mail had arrived.

The B & O railroad laborers building the trestle, tracks and overhead bridge, got their mail at that post office, as did everyone in the area.

By Lois B. Cobler

The Altona Post Office was located on the southwest corner of West Quincy & Baker Streets.





Round Ring Binders

11" x 8 1/2" Sheet size

Black 7-39201 Gray

DK Blue 7-39202 Blue

Royal Blue 7-39203 Green

Red 7-39204 White

Made in Mex



